Collectanea.

BUILDING MATERIALS.[1]

In the erection of the great abbeys and collegiate churches, where no expense was spared, the materials were frequently fetched from great distances. Thus, the soft freestone of Caen, in Normandy, was used in the construction of many of the principal churches and conventual buildings of the south and east of England. But in building private houses, the cost of carriage was too great to admit of the use of such distant materials. Hence, stone houses are only or chiefly to be met with in those parts of the country which possess beds of workable stone; as, for instance, upon that generally broad band of oolitic freestone, which, beginning in Dorsetshire, stretches in a north-east direction across Somerset, the north-west of Wilts, Gloucester, Oxford, Northampton, Lincoln, and the northern extremity of Yorkshire. It is upon, or within a short distance of this tract, that we meet with nearly all the most noble and decorated specimens of early domestic architecture, as well as a rich assemblage of churches—all highly ornamented, in consequence of the easy working character of the freestone. It is, however, greatly to be regretted, that in some parts of the range, this stone is liable to weather, as it is called, or scale off; a circumstance from which the splendid buildings of Oxford, in particular, have suffered such cruel mutilation. Eastward of the line runs the range of chalk hills, through the counties of Dorset, South Wilts, Hants, Berks, Bucks, Hertford, and Cambridge, branching off likewise into Surrey and Kent. In these, flint and hard chalk are the ordinary building materials, very unfavourable to architectural purposes, and occasioning a paucity of handsome ancient residences throughout that district. In the exceptions which occur, as at Cambridge itself, the stone has been laboriously brought from the neighbouring oolite range. In the remaining eastern counties, the soil chiefly consists of alluvial clays and gravel, and compelled the adoption of bricks as a substitute for stone in the construction of houses of every class; by which the prevailing character of their architecture was materially affected. In London, however, the buildings are said by Stow to have been chiefly of wood, up to the time of James I., who, by divers proclamations, enforced the use of brick and stone, as well, it is said, for the sake of preventing the too rapid consumption of our native forests, as for security against fire. In the western, and many of the midland counties, Devon, Worcester, Shropshire, Cheshire, Stafford, Leicester, Warwick, Nottinghamshire, &c., where the deep marly soil, which the geologists call the *new red*, prevails, and which were anciently covered with extensive oak forests, timber has been always the principal material employed in the construction of houses. It is in this district that we still see so many of those picturesque buildings in which the wooden framework, painted black, contrasts so strikingly with the intervals of white plaster. Where the hard beds of stone which are interstratified with the marl, have been employed, as in so many of the churches in these counties, the destruction occasioned by its weathering has been usually greater even than what we have remarked of the Oxford oolite. Lamentable indeed is the condition of many of their exteriors. Their sculptured ornaments of every kind, pinnacle and crocket, cusp and foliaged capital, are all corroded into shapeless knobs, while each separate stone of the angles or flat wall is worn down by repeated exfoliations of the edges to a round lumpish form. The natural dingy red colour of the stone, by itself unfavourable, completes the disfigurement of the building. The architect or antiquary may study with interest these faded beauties, and glean some information even from their unsightly remains; but as architectural objects, their power of exciting general admiration is gone for ever. The same remark is unfortunately applicable to many of the otherwise most beautiful buildings of Scotland, where this red sandstone is still in use, and the little attention paid to its want of durability, so lamentably attested.

But not only did the materials composing the walls of our forefathers' houses mainly depend on the geological features of the country, but those also of the roof, and consequently, as we have already remarked, its form and structure. In woody districts, splinters of timber (shingles) were formerly much used in this country, as they still are in Germany and the Alps. Near the slate districts of Wales and Westmorland, that material was of course employed for the purpose; and a coarser, but highly picturesque slab, called there stone-tile, in the midland oolite range. In the eastern counties, burnt tile was the substitute; and in the chalky soils, straw thatch, which is still the almost universal roofing material for their farm-buildings and cottages in the present day.

Antiquarian writers have usually overlooked these obvious causes for the local preference of particular building materials, and have erroneously ascribed the general substitution of stone or brick for timber, and of slate or tile for thatch, for one particular epoch. Thus, it has been asserted that up to the reign of Elizabeth, the houses of the gentry throughout England were entirely built of timber; whereas it is certainly not too much to say that of the mansions of earlier date than that reign, which remain entire or in part at this day, three-fourths at least are built of stone or brick. The latter material is stated by Bagford and other writers to have been first introduced in the reign of Henry VII. Yet Eltham Palace, in Oxfordshire, erected by William Delapole, and Hurstmonceaux Castle, in Sussex, both of brick, are attributed to the reign of Henry VI. Oxburgh Hall, in Norfolk, was erected in the reign of Edward IV. Leland mentions the walls of Hungerford, as early as Richard II., being of that material; and Stow says that Ralph Stratford, Bishop of London, enclosed the burial-ground in the Charter House for those that died of the plague in 1348, with a wall of brick. That roofing-tiles were in use before the time of Richard I., is proved by the order made in the first year of that reign, that the houses of the city of London should be covered with "brent tyle" instead of straw or reeds. Indeed, it is highly improbable that the art of making bricks and tiles, which had been practised in such perfection by the Romans during their occupation of the island, as is evident in the numerous remains of their buildings, should have been wholly lost, however much it may have deteriorated, in those parts of the country where brick earth is plentiful, and stone and slate impossible to be procured.

Many of the characteristics of our early domestic architecture seem to have been determined by the nature of the materials employed. The stories jutting forth one over the other, so as almost to arch over the narrow streets, and allow the occupiers of the upper floors not only to converse, but occasionally even to shake hands across the way, could only be executed in houses of which the framework was timber, and were suggested by the necessity of keeping the wooden foundations dry, at a time when no other mode was employed for conveying away the rain-water from roofs than the dropping eaves or dragon-mouthed spout. In like manner the deep ornamental verges and richly figured barge-pendants, which so highly adorn some ancient manor-houses, are necessarily peculiar to wooden structures, and only to be met with in those districts where timber was the most accessible material. Our modern imitators constantly misapply this picturesque ornament by attaching it, with the far-projecting eaves which it accompanies, to buildings entirely of solid stone, needing no such protection for their ground-course, where the stone coping and parapet would be far more appropriate. On the other hand, in the erection of residences in districts well supplied with stone, and particularly near the oolite quarries which we have traced across the heart of England, the beauty of this material, and the ease with which it is carved, suggested a variety of characteristic adornments—the pierced and battlemented parapet—the crocketted pinnacle—the grotesque sculptures attached to the dripstone—the feathered window-arch—the heraldic figures that terminate the gable—the paralleled angle turrets, and the armorial shields scattered over the walls.

Even in the countries where brick was necessarily substituted for stone, the facility for moulding and colouring that material gave rise to some peculiarity of design in the richly embossed chimney-shafts and finials, and the devices let into the walls, for the sake of giving variety to a flat surface, which we see in the beautiful mansions of Helmingham, Basham, Hampton Court, Chenies, Hengrave, and Sutton, in Suffolk.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POINTED ARCHITECTURE.[2]—WINDOWS.

Of all the component features of pointed architecture, none can be considered more striking than the *window*,—a feature to which that style has imparted a beauty unimagined in the finest achievements of classic times. The windows principally recognised in the perpendicular style are the simple pointed, the obtuse pointed, the curtailed segment-headed, the square-headed, and the oriel. In all these the consideration which most directly affects their excellence (propriety of moulding being presupposed) is that any ornamental detail occurring in their heads should be compounded of continuous lines and ramifications, happily blending with and issuing from each other; and that any geometrical figures introduced should be such as fill up with most completeness the spaces assigned to them.

Another circumstance observable in the composition of the most satisfactory specimens of ancient arch-headed windows, and one second only to the former, is, that where a window contains a greater number than three or four "days," its composition is divided into two or three principal masses by means of mullions, strengthened above the rest by the use of an additional moulding on the face, and terminating only in the great arch which bounds the whole: a practice essential to perspicuity and force of design. The east window of York Cathedral has by some been adduced as the finest existing specimen of the perpendicular style of window; but if there be any ground for the observation just made, and any distinction of import between the terms *fine* and *showy*, we venture to think that compositions may be found in this country of a more obviously meritorious character. The stronger mullions which divide the lower part of the window into three general portions (each of three again) are not continued in such a manner as to carry their full substance up into the mouldings of the great arch; and the head, therefore, which most needs the distinction, becomes, though crowded with ornamental compartments, somewhat deficient in character. The east window in the choir of Gloucester Cathedral, though composed with no such dazzling intricacy as the former, exhibits a design in which the relation of parts is marked with much greater judgment and effect. The larger mullions running to the top divide the whole into three great and lofty portions; these again are subdivided in width and height, and terminate above in compartments at once highly elegant, characteristic, and chaste. Another fine example of composition in the perpendicular style may be instanced in the great front window of Westminster Hall.

In windows of the *obtusely-arched* outline we have numberless illustrations of design. The great west window of King's College Chapel, those of the little chapels which flank the same magnificent building, those of the clere story of Henry the Seventh's Chapel, and many others, might be adduced to exemplify dignity and richness of effect, and freedom and elegance of outline.

The curtailed *segment-headed* is another pleasing variety of window; by which term we would designate those lights whose heads are formed of two simple curves, not flowing out of the upright lines of the sides, but meeting them at an angle, so as to produce in the head three angles instead of one. Of this kind of window (filled up in a similar style to the former, and surmounted by a hood moulding) Winchester Cathedral, Boston Church, and many other edifices of the same period, will afford us tasteful examples. The *square-headed* window will need no elucidation to the person who has visited either of our universities, or any of the existing mansions of the Tudor times. Few specimens of this feature, however (if elaborate finish be required), can exceed in elegance a rich form of window executed in the cloisters of Christ Church, Oxford.

The remaining description of window, the

[1] Continued from page 431.

[2] From a series of papers on the Modern Use of the Architectural Styles of the Middle Ages, by Mr. E. Trotman.

For a comprehensive guide on PDF Compression and OCR visit: ePaperless.com